

Court House Group  
Eastville  
Northampton County, Virginia

HABS No. VA-594  
Va-

HABS  
VA  
66-EAST,  
1-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE  
Washington Office, Division of Design and Construction  
Washington 25, D. C.

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Buildings on Court House Green

Antecedent Court House: The first Court House at the present site (the thrid to be erected in the county for actual court purposes, as opposed to taverns and private dwellings where meetings had been held), was erected in 1715. The specifications for this building bearing date of April 19, merit quoting in full:

"This day William Rabyshaw hath undertaken the building and Errecting up a Court house at a Place called the horns Old feild upon the land of Mr. Savage for Seven thousand pounds of Tobacco according to the Dementions hereafter mentioned viz: The said Courthouse to be thirty foot long and twenty foot wide from inside to inside well framed of Sawed Timber Except Gice (joists) and Plate and to be oversated of Eight foot Pitch from Sill to plate and to be covered with white Oake Shingells the Sape to be taken out; upon Oak Laths wweather boarded with good thru quarter old pine Plank with outside Chimily to be Lathed and filled in and Plastered; with a good Paire Stares; all the upper flower to be Layed with good pine Old Planke and the under part of the said flower to be well Plained; two dores to be well hinged with hooks and hinges to the said house within the care where the Justices is to Sett and that to bee raised and to be Layed with plained Old pine Plank Sawed out of Old Pine

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and the Sitt Benches to be well Plained and the Railes  
for the Bare and a Dore at Each End of the bare to be  
well hinged with hooks and hinges and to be an Earthen  
Flower Except where the Justices is to Sitt and that to  
be done as aforesaid and the Same to be viewed by two  
honest workmen as he goes a Long and all to be Compleated  
and Ended workman like between the date hereof and May  
Come twelve mounths which is the Years Seventeen hundred  
and Sixteen and the said Rebyshaw Forthwith repaire to  
the Clark Office and theire enter in bond with good Se-  
curity for his performance of the said Courthouse."

Restored Court House: Fifteen years later, this antecedent framed  
structure was so ruinous as to require replacement and Court on De-  
cember 9, 1730 ordered that:

"The Courthouse of this County being much out of  
repair and not in a Condition for the Justices to do the  
County business in, which the Court having taken into  
consideration came to A Resolution to build one of Brick  
and to treat with workmen who will undertake the same in  
February Court next, and it is ordered that the Sheriff  
give Public Notice hereof, both in Accomack and this County."

The sequel to this action came on February 9, 1731 as shown by  
the entry:

"The Court having in December Court last past an order  
to treat with Workmen to build A Brick Courthouse for this

County and this day several bidders appearing and Mr. John Marshall being the fairest proposer for the undertaking of the building at 50,000 pounds of Tobacco to finish it according to a Range Scheme this day read in open Court to the proposer ordered that the said Marshall give Bond with good and sufficient security in the sum of 100,000 pounds of Tobacco to finish the said work by the last day of December next."

Unfortunately, the full specifications were not committed to record, but without doubt the above references relate to the building since relocated and restored. Its original location was the prominent spot where now stands the Confederate monument. Proposals in 1913 to tear down the old Court House along with related structures raised a storm of protests and the local chapter of the Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities was able to stem the tide, but not before an old jail and the wall about it had partially disappeared. The Court building was moved to approximately the site of this jail. Before its removal the building had served a number of purposes, notably as storehouse and saloon, which probably accounts for some of the drastic patching observed in the masonry. The entire front has been rebuilt, incorporating a door frame salvaged from a later house on Granby Street in Norfolk.

County Clerk's Office: The Clerk's Office which stands behind the restored Court House, is not so well documented as the former, but

architecturally would seem to be contemporary. The door is paneled on the outside and battened on the inside like so many early doors in the locality. Inside the floor is paved with odd-sized flagstones and there is a fireplace with flanking cupboards. There is an arched ceiling. This building has also been restored by the APVA and is used as a local history museum.

As a matter of passing interest the colonial records for Northampton County formerly filed here, are reputed to be the oldest continuous ones preserved in any of the original thirteen states.

Debtors' Prison: West of the Clerk's Office is an old wall laid in Flemish bond and incorporating the gable end of the Debtors' Prison. One gets the impression from the brickwork that this building was erected in the corner of a pre-existing enclosure, and the character of the window opening facing the Green, together with the common bond of the inner walls, support such an analysis. The late Ralph T. Whitelaw who is authority for all our historical data, believed the structure to be of relatively late origin. He contended it might be the jail built by William Satchell under contract in 1814 for \$3,169.59 $\frac{1}{2}$ , as it did not fit any of the dimensions given for some of the early prisons. Incidentally, Accomack County did not segregate debtors until 1824.

Like other buildings in the Court House group, the Debtors' Prison also was restored by the APVA.

Brick Store, adjoining Court Green: Close study of the land records for the area where this commercial building now stands inclined Mr. Whitelaw to the belief that it originated in the twenty-year interval between 1800 and 1820.

This rectangular brick building is laid in Flemish bond, side as well as front. The roof is gabled, with box eaves; the street end has a semicircular window. Slate covering may be original. Window detail was recorded primarily for the large scale outer bead, thought to have a possible bearing on dating similar work elsewhere in town.

The Brick Store at the present time is unoccupied and neglected. The shop front and inside fittings are characteristic of the late Victorian era. HABS hopes that some useful purpose will be found for a sound and worthy building which contributes to the neighborhood air of homogeneity in Eastville.

Eastville Inn, South of Brick Store: From early times, one has almost invariably found an inn or tavern in close proximity to a courthouse. As early as 1724 a survey showed that Elias Roberts had a house south of Northampton court and that Roberts was a tavern-keeper. It is reasonable to believe that a tavern at this same site has been in continuous existence. In 1780 John Tazewell of Williamsburg sold the lots on which the building is located to James Taylor who was likewise a tavern keeper. For more than a hundred years the place was known as the "Taylor House." Ralph T. Whitelaw relates how the property was acquired in the third quarter of the nineteenth

century by J. Ambler Jarvis, and reproduces a drawing by Howard Pyle setting-forth Jarvis' sign ("A Peninsula Canaan," Harper's New Monthly Magazine, May, 1879). Whitelaw believed the present building dates from 1780, but alterations and additions make it extremely difficult to tell just what was its original state. The building possesses a good modillion cornice and doorway. The one-storied porch across the front is of recent vintage.

Reference: Ralph T. Whitelaw, Virginia's Eastern Shore, Richmond, Virginia, Virginia Historical Society, 1951, Volume One, pp. 244-60.

Prepared by: Worth Bailey, HABS National Park Service, June, 1960.

Approved: \_\_\_\_\_

Acting Chief Architect

Date

Charles H. Essig  
2/20/61

ADDENDUM TO:  
COURTHOUSE GROUP AREA SURVEY  
U.S. Route 13  
Eastville  
Northampton County  
Virginia

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PHOTOGRAPHS

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY  
National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
1849 C Street NW  
Washington, DC 20240-0001